

# **JULY 4<sup>TH</sup> RECEPTION REMARKS**

**July 4, 2007**

Good evening and welcome. Thank you for joining us today to celebrate the founding of the United States of America and the 231<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. I am pleased to see so many friends at this Fourth of July celebration. Your friendship is important to all of us and your presence here tonight honors us.

I want to extend a special welcome to the U.S. Air Force String Quintet, which traveled here from Germany to join us for this evening's celebration. Thank you for adding your beautiful music to tonight's festivities. Let's give them a round of applause.

I would like to thank the staff of the Consulate who worked hard over many months to organize this event. And I also would like to extend a big thank you to our many sponsors, without whose support we could not have enjoyed such a lovely party. In particular, I would like to single out BCI Motorola Group for their most generous contribution. Please give all of them a hand as well.

Finally, I would like to extend a warm welcome to a good friend, Dr. Salam Fayyad. Salam has been a regular guest at these Fourth of July events over the years, but I am pleased to welcome him back tonight as Prime Minister Fayyad. Mabrouk!

Salam, I know these are difficult times for the Palestinian people. I can assure you that the United States Government intends to work closely with you and with your new government to help the Palestinian people achieve the peace and security and prosperity they are seeking. Secretary Rice will also continue her efforts with President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to chart a course towards peace in this troubled region, with the objective of establishing a Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security. And we hope this result will be achieved soon.

Today is the Fourth of July, and I would like to focus my remarks tonight on America's history and the values that shaped our country. Many of you may remember that I spoke last year about two great Americans, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who played such an essential role in the founding of our country. Another American who played an equally important role in our history, building upon the work of our founding fathers, was Abraham Lincoln.

In his day, Lincoln inspired us to overcome the greatest challenge any nation could face – division within.

Lincoln's words evoke the American spirit and continue to inspire Americans to this day. For example, Lincoln's first inaugural address, given on the eve of the Civil War, concludes as follows:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Lincoln's most well known address, and probably the best example of any American speech, is his Gettysburg Address. He spoke in November 1863 to dedicate the Gettysburg National Cemetery. None of us can hear the opening line of that speech without feeling the power of those words:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Lincoln had a solemn duty that day honoring the many thousands of Americans who died at the Battle of Gettysburg. Lincoln kept his words to a minimum, speaking only two minutes, but in those two minutes, he delivered a powerful message of sorrow, bravery, strength and hope. He encouraged all Americans:

to resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain  
... that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth  
of freedom and that this government of the people, by  
the people, and for the people, shall not perish from  
the earth.

The survival of the United States was very much in doubt at that point in our history, in the midst of a Civil War only 87 years after the Declaration of Independence had been signed. A young and growing country, the United States seemed to have lost its way.

In 1863, July Fourth was not a day for celebration, but a day for reflection. In Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the guns fell silent on July Fourth. After three days of an exhausting and horrific battle, both sides collected their dead and wounded and looked out across the field of battle, contemplating what had happened there. At the same moment, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a siege of almost two months ended on July Fourth with the surrender of the Confederate forces to General Ulysses S Grant.



One might think Lincoln would have been elated on that Fourth of July: at Gettysburg the Union army had stopped the northern advance of the Confederates and at Vicksburg General Grant had taken control of the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy in half. But Lincoln knew the Civil War was far from over, and he knew that many more would die before the war came to an end.

The Battle of Gettysburg continues to serve as a vivid reminder of the dangerous consequences of forgetting the principles that bind a nation together. Each year hundreds of thousands of Americans and visitors from around the world walk the Gettysburg battlefield, preserved as a national memorial and cemetery. These days, it is a beautiful and peaceful place, but the noise and chaos of the battle is not far below the surface. Standing on that ridge defended by Union forces, one cannot imagine what those American soldiers considered as they rested their bodies and souls on that July Fourth in 1863. However, I often imagine that many of them anticipated Lincoln's words later in that year, when he called for a rebirth of the nation to pursue the path charted by our founding fathers.

Throughout our history we have returned again and again to the fundamental principles on which our country was founded. Every great American speaker, including Lincoln, has recognized that the simple words in the Declaration of Independence, whose signing we celebrate today, cannot be improved upon. In their straight-forward way, they define America:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

For Americans, the Fourth of July is a time to reaffirm our commitment to these fundamental principles and to honor those -- including Abraham Lincoln -- who gave their lives to preserve our nation. In every nation's history there will be difficult times, but we have found our way as we hold fast to these simple truths and universal values that make us who we are and guide us always.

Let me thank you again for joining us tonight to celebrate the founding of the United States and to toast her future. It is my great pleasure to be among so many friends here tonight, and I invite you to continue to enjoy the party and the lovely music and wish you all a very happy Fourth of July.